

学校编码: 10384
学号: X2008110004

分类号____密级____
UDC____

廈門大學

硕士学位论文

旅游文本中文化翻译的可译性研究
——以福建旅游景点为例

On Cultural Translatability in Tourist Text Translation
—— A Case Study of Scenic Spots in Fujian Province

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论文提交日期: 2012年7月

论文答辩时间: 2012年9月

学位授予日期: 2012年 月

答辩委员会主席: _____

评阅人: _____

2012年 月

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摘 要

长期以来,可译性问题一直是翻译研究的重要课题。语言是文化的载体,又是表达思想的工具。但由于不同的文化传统、语言结构和思维模式,语言有时又不是完全可译的,甚至是不可译的。文化的可译性只能是个限度的问题。翻译中文化的可译性限度的存在,是翻译实践中一个不容回避的客观现实,研究和讨论文化的可译性限度、分析其产生的原因、寻找解决的办法,对于有效地提高译文的质量、促进跨文化的交流,在理论和实践上都有着重要的指导意义。

由于中西方的语言和文化差异,旅游资料通常需要经过翻译才能有效地发挥其传递信息和文化交流的作用,才能吸引更多的游客,同时把独具中国特色的文化生动真实地展现给外国旅游者,弘扬中国文化。福建省作为中国的一个重要旅游省份,有着独特的历史和文化资源。然而,要把福建省发展成一个旅游大省需要各方面的努力,旅游文本的翻译是极其重要的一个方面。但目前旅游资料的翻译很难满足日益发展的旅游业的需求。同时,对于福建旅游文本翻译的研究也是寥寥可数。本文以卡特福德的不可译性研究和奈达的功能对等作为理论依据,通过阐述文化、翻译和旅游之间的联系,分析了导致旅游文本中文化翻译的可译性限度的主要原因,并提出了一些相应的补偿措施,例如,增益、类比、注释、音译法等,以及各种方法的合理结合。这些方法的应用有助于实现旅游文本翻译的两个主要目的,即吸引游客和传播中国文化。本文最后总结指出,可译与不可译是相对的,可译或不可译不是一种静态的结果,而是一个可以转化的动态过程。随着旅游业的发展,文化交流的扩大深化和译者的努力,旅游文本中文化的可译性限度正在日益缩小。

关键词: 旅游文本 文化 可译性限度 功能对等

Abstract

Among various issues in translation studies, the study of translatability has drawn special attention for a long time. Language is the carrier of culture as well as the tool of expressing ideas. However, owing to the regional differences in cultural tradition, language structure and thinking model, language is not completely translatable, and it is sometimes even untranslatable. The existence of the limits of cultural translatability in translation is an objective reality that cannot be avoided in translation practice. As to the improvement of translation and promotion of the cross-cultural exchange, it is of theoretical and practical significance to study the limits of cultural translatability and look for the methods to solve it.

Due to the linguistic and cultural differences between China and the Western countries, the tourist texts usually need to be translated before they can play the role of offering information and cultural exchange. Fujian Province, as a popular tourist destination in China, has its unique history and culture. But there is still a large amount of work to be done before it becomes a major tourism province. Tourist translation plays an important role in this process. At present, the translation of tourist texts cannot meet the rapid development of tourism. By revealing the relationships between culture, translation and tourism this thesis analyzes some main reasons that cause the limits of cultural translatability on the basis of functional equivalence. Some compensation methods are introduced by discussing some cultural translation practices in tourist texts. At last, it is pointed out that both translatability and untranslatability are relative. Neither of them is a static result, but a transformable dynamic process. With the development of tourism, the enlarging and deepening of cultural exchange and translators' efforts, the limits of cultural translatability in tourist texts have been greatly reduced.

Key words: tourist texts; culture; limits of translatability; functional equivalence

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Introduction

Tourist translation has long been a great interest to those in the field of both tourism and translation. As the international tourist market develops, this interest grows day by day. Undoubtedly, there are a large number of papers discussing the translation of tourist texts. As a representative in the field of tourism and translation, Chen Gang (陈刚, 2002:38) considered that tourism translation was a kind of cross-cultural translation, and he studied the issue from a perspective of cultural translation. According to Chen Gang, the translators should be tourist-oriented and be as ready as tour guides in promoting Chinese culture, and develop cross-cultural awareness in the following five aspects: *Pinyin* spelling of names of places and tourist attractions; translation of names of tourist attractions and historical personages; pragmatic meaning; poetry translation; and cultural information processing. Zhang Ning (张宁, 2000:54) analyzed cultural differences between Chinese and Western Cultures as reflected in tourist texts. He quoted some flawed Chinese-English translated sentences to illustrate how Chinese culture is lost in the English version. Yao Baorong and Han Qi (姚宝荣、韩琪 1998:27) maintained that the major considerations of tourism translation must be its readability and acceptability, as the ultimate purpose of tourism translation is to attract potential tourists. Through analyzing a number of erroneous translations, they explain how readability and acceptability of the target texts are spoiled. Moreover, Jia Wenbo (贾文波 2003:20), Yang Min and Ji Aimei (杨敏、纪爱梅 2003:31), and Kang Ning (康宁 2005:85) have also made contribution to tourism translation. These researches discuss tourism translation from different aspects, and give us valuable insights into further translation studies.

The World Tourism Organization has made such a forecast that China will become the largest tourist-receiving country and the fourth largest one in tourism resources in the world by 2020(<http://news.sina.com.cn>). Information from China National Tourism Administration shows that China has launched a global promotion of its tourism

industry (<http://www.chinanews.com>). A phenomenon is also taking shape that China is becoming a more popular destination for overseas tourists after the 2008 Olympic Games and the 2010 Shanghai Expo. Therefore, the C-E translation of Chinese tourist texts is of great significance if China wants to attract more international tourists and serves them better. Fujian Province, as a popular tourist destination in China, has its unique history and culture, and will certainly attract an increasing number of foreign tourists. Though the importance of C-E translation of tourism materials has been recognized by the translation circle, the quality of the translated tourist texts is far from being satisfactory, which hampers the smooth cross-cultural communication and gives overseas tourists a negative impression of the true value of Chinese culture. Thus, it becomes an urgent task to make immediate improvement to tourist translations. Great efforts should be made to produce effective English translation of tourist texts when addressing overseas tourists whose cognitive pattern and psychological habits are quite different from those of Chinese tourists. Most of the problems are due to the ignorance of cultural differences. Tourism translation is considered to be a special form of intercultural communication. Therefore, the cultural differences should be taken into account when translating. As to some culture-specific terms in tourist texts, special treatment is needed to make them translatable and acceptable.

Although there have been a large number of studies on the C-E translation of tourist texts, most of the researches are either on the translation of tourist texts generally or on certain aspects of the translation of tourist texts, very few have focused on the limits of translatability of culture in tourist texts in a specific location, especially in Fujian Province, where there are rich tourist attractions with distinct features. Therefore, this thesis aims at attracting more attention from the translation circle to be placed on the limits of translatability of culture in tourist texts, especially that in Fujian Province, so that a joint effort could be made to improve the existing translated English versions of Chinese tourist texts.

The data are mainly collected from *Simulation Guide* (模拟导游, 2011) with some examples taken from other books or from the internet concerning the translation of tourist texts as supplementary materials.

The book *Simulation Guide* was edited by Li Dongmei and published by Xiamen University Press in 2011. So far, there are few books concerning the tourism translation in Fujian Province in English. The publication of the book is badly needed and has its significance. However, there are still quite a number of mistakes in it. In view of this, a critical analysis on this book is conducted in the hope of providing some insights into C-E translation of tourist texts in Fujian Province and promotes the development of tourism of Fujian Province.

The research method used in this thesis is mainly comparative analysis and theoretical analysis, for example, the contrastive analysis between SL (source language) readers and TL (target language) readers and contrastive analysis between two translation versions. Meanwhile, a large number of examples are given to illustrate the concrete translation methods.

This thesis consists of four chapters besides the introduction and the conclusion. In Introduction, the author briefly introduces the research background of the limits of cultural translatability in tourist texts, its current situation, significance, and sources of data collected. Chapter One mainly introduces Catford's linguistic untranslatability and cultural untranslatability and Nida's functional equivalence theory, which are the theoretical framework of this thesis. In Chapter Two, the author gives a brief introduction to tourist texts; introduces the functions, and rules of tourist text translation. By analyzing the relationship between tourism, culture and translation, we can find that translation of tourist texts is a typical intercultural communication. Chapter Three mainly deals with the cultural differences between China and the West, and classifies the limits of cultural translatability in tourist texts. Chapter Four is the most important part of this thesis. In this chapter, some strategies and methods are analyzed to compensate the limits of cultural translatability by giving examples of the translation of dynasties, proper names, names of tourist attractions, culture specific terms and other contents that usually appear in tourist texts. A conclusion is drawn in this chapter that to reduce cultural untranslatability in tourist texts we can use the methods such as amplification, analogy, transliteration, annotation, rewriting, etc. and more often than not the combination of some of them is necessary.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

1.1 Catford's Linguistic Untranslatability and Cultural

Untranslatability

Translatability means that the contents and culture of one language can be translated into another one smoothly so that the target readers can get the similar understanding as that of the source readers (刘宓庆, 2005:110). It is the question of how a translator must proceed, or which approach he or she should follow in his or her method of translating, in order to arrive at a translation which accords with his or her qualitative objectives.

J.C. Catford, a celebrated translation scholar of linguistic school, raised the issue of untranslatability in 1965. He proposed a method to assess the translatability of texts based on the degree to which a given text can be contextualized in the target language, taking into consideration all linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. He put forward the concept “the limits of translation” and he distinguished two types of untranslatability: linguistic and cultural (1965:93). Linguistic untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the target language for a source language item. While cultural untranslatability is due to the absence in the TL culture of a relevant situational feature for the SL text. He said that cultural untranslatability was less “absolute” than linguistic untranslatability. Moreover, he pointed out that it was not necessary to distinguish the distinction between these two types of untranslatability since some cultural untranslatable terms also have within them some linguistic untranslatability. According to Catford, “translation fails—or untranslatability occurs—when it is impossible to build functionally relevant features of the situation into the contextual meaning of the TL text.” (*ibid*)

As for the limits of translatability, Catford took the relative view. Translation equivalence depends on the interchangeability of the SL and TL texts in the same situation, ultimately on relationship of SL and TL texts to the same relevant features of

situation-substance (1965:93).

Translatability and untranslatability are the two sides of the coin of translation. Translatability refers to the nature of meaning that can be fully conveyed in translation, whereas untranslatability means the nature of meaning that cannot be completely conveyed in translation. Simply, translatability means the possibility of conveying from source language into target language, while untranslatability means the impossibility of the limits of conveying. We can see the relationship between translatability and untranslatability from the following figure (徐丹, 1993:93).

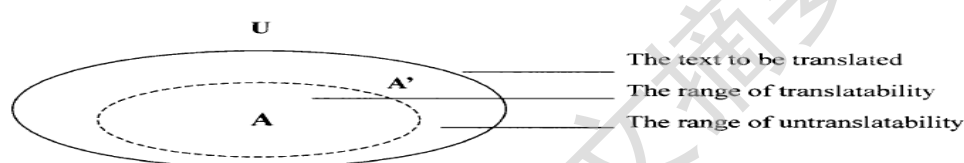


Figure 1.1 relationship between translatability and untranslatability

In the above figure, the complete set U represents the text to be translated. The subset A represents the range of translatability, that is, the meaning which is translatable in this range. The supplementary set A' represents the range of untranslatability, that is, the meaning which in this range is basically untranslatable. And the borderline between A and A' is in dashed line which means their range is dynamic rather than static. There is no sharp borderline between translatability and untranslatability.

Limits of translatability, or even untranslatability, which is the extreme of such limitations, are not contradictory to the translatability of language as a whole, because they are said of particular aspects of language, not of language as a whole.

1.2 The Causes of Translatability and Untranslatability

People using different languages may have different cognitive features in understanding the objective things and material entities. But they share the same material foundation. Such identity may form a simple but nearly identical conceptual systematic framework in their minds (王丽君, 2008:15). From the angle of linguistics, this “conceptual systematic framework” is a semantic system. In epistemology, it is called “isomorph”, or “the basic isomorph”. Isomorphs are the basic thinking

mechanism for the similarity of human consciousness and the basic condition for people possessing different languages to communicate. The principle of isomorph is the theoretical foundation of translatability. With the help of this principle, it is easy to understand why people speaking different languages can exchange information and conduct communication. Moreover, translatability is the leading aspect of the contradictory opposites.

There are differences between Chinese culture and Western culture. Different histories, customs, and different ways of thinking make it possible for different nations to have their own ways to use words, thus forming their own special language forms. Therefore, it is impossible to translate all the appeals in the original language to the target language, since certain culture can only be expressed in its special language with its special cultural connotation. In other words, “Language A carries Culture A and Language B carries Culture B. This is very natural and competent. Translation is to change the carrier, making Language B carry Culture A. Therefore, it is not totally competent, of course.” (周志培, 2003:484)

Because of the difference between cultural focuses and different ways of describing the world, there are always word vacancies appearing in target language, forming a barrier to translation, which is the so-called “untranslatability” or “the limits of translatability”.

1.3 Relative Untranslatability and Absolute Untranslatability

Relative untranslatability means that translation can be possible in one condition but fail in another one. Language plays the function of culture carrier and preserver, so there is a lexical gap between different cultures. When translating new words and expressions, translators have to use compensation methods to explain. As time goes by, people will be familiar with and accept them as part of their vocabulary and expressions. So it takes time to translate the words and expressions properly and adequately. Generally speaking, the cultural function brings relative untranslatability, which can be found from the following three aspects: The first one is about the lexical vacancy. For this part, we have to coin new words by transliterating. The Chinese words “*jiaozi*”

(饺子) and “*Kung Fu*” (功夫) are among the examples. The second one is about the words with transferring meaning. To translate these words, we have to coin words or expressions to refer to the specific meaning of expressions from the source language. For example, we translate “crocodile’s tears” into “鳄鱼的眼泪”, “sour grapes” into “酸葡萄” and “纸老虎” into “paper tiger”. As they embody cultural background, the connotative meaning of these expressions will not be reproduced in another language. Therefore, they are relative untranslatable. The third one is about the expressions which exist in both Chinese and English but they are different in their connotative meanings. “龙” in Chinese and “dragon” in English is a typical example. To Chinese “龙” is something sacred. To Westerners, however, the dragon is often a symbol of evil, a fierce monster that destroys and therefore must be destroyed (<http://news.sina.com.cn>). Words like this belong to relative translatability. Most of untranslatability is relative and can be translatable with the development of translation and intercultural communication.

Absolute untranslatability is the case in which one language cannot be translated into another due to some reasons. One of the main reasons is the aesthetic function of language. Each language has its peculiar sound and written form which display its aesthetic effect. If the language form or special sound effect cannot be reproduced in the target language, the original aesthetic function of the source language will be lost. Poetry is a typical example of absolute untranslatability because poetry itself is concise and melodious, which is impossible to convey in another language.

1.4 Nida’s Functional Equivalence and Reader’s Response

Eugene A. Nida, a world-famous American linguist and translation theorist, has an overwhelming influence in the translation field. One of Nida’s most important contributions to translation theory is his functional equivalence and reader’s response.

1.4.1 Functional Equivalence

In *Towards a Science of Translating* (2004), Nida argued that there were two different types of equivalence, namely formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal

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